

Civility vs. savagery

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



In William Golding's novel "Lord of the Flies," civility, which is associated with morality and goodness, and savagery, associated with evil and corruptness, are constantly at war. The conflict between the novel's main protagonist and antagonist, Ralph and Jack, represents the broader struggle of these two ideas. Civility and savagery are further represented through recurring symbols throughout the novel. Lastly, these conflicting ideas present themselves in internal battles within the characters.

Through external conflicts, symbolism, and internal struggles, the war between savagery and civility appears constantly throughout the novel. Ralph and Jack's power struggle correlates with the battle between savagery and civility. From the novel's beginning, Ralph's main priority is to maintain the fire so the boys can be rescued. He says, "If a ship comes near the island they may not notice us. So we must make smoke on top of the mountain. We must make a fire"(38). Ralph's leadership and desire to return to society represent civility.

However, as the boys continue to be trapped on the island, Jack's violent tendencies begin to emerge. "He tried to convey the compulsion to track down and kill that was swallowing him up"(51). Without adults and the laws of civilization repressing it, Jack's savage nature becomes apparent. Jack and Ralph eventually clash over their contradicting ideas of leadership. Ralph shouts "Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?"(180). As the boys' fears increase, and their hopes of being rescued diminish, they turn to Jack for leadership, and civilization is no longer able to coexist with savagery on the island.

The conflict between Ralph and Jack provides a concrete perspective on the overall struggle between civility and savagery. There are multiple symbols in the novel that embody certain aspects of civilization and savagery. Order and unity are epitomized by the conch shell. The shell originally had a powerful influence over the boys, but its power diminishes as the boys become increasingly barbaric, and it is eventually lost forever. "... the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist"(181).

The shattering of the conch shell represents the loss of order on the island. Another important symbol is the face paint worn by Jack, and later the rest of his tribe, which helps draw out their savage nature. " He capered toward Bill, and the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness"(64). The mask created by the paint is a form of escapism for Jack; it allows him to free himself of the proper boy he once was in civilization, and let his barbaric impulses take control.

One last important symbol is the signal fire, which serves as the boys' only connection to the civilized world. Ralph states " The fire is the most important thing on the island. How can we ever be rescued except by luck, if we don't keep a fire going? "(80). As the boys become increasingly savage, they forget the importance of the signal fire and rescue, which signifies their isolation from civilization. Throughout the novel, the use of symbolism is significant in representing the progression of civility and savagery.

The internal conflict between civility and savagery presents itself in varying degrees within the characters. Roger is a complete savage, who enjoys inflicting pain on others, but his savagery is still partially contained by the rules of civilization. " Yet there was a space round Henry, perhaps six yards

in diameter, into which he dare not throw. Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law. Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilization that knew nothing of him and was in ruins"(62).

Although he has a true savage nature, Roger's barbaric instincts conflict with the laws of civilization that he was once so accustomed to living by. On the contrary, Simon is a naturally good character who is aware of the savageness existing inside the boys. In a hallucination, the Lord of the Flies says to him " You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? "(143). Simon fears that he and the rest of the boys will eventually become corrupted by the evilness of man's heart. When performing a ritual dance during a thunderstorm, Piggy and Ralph get caught up in the excitement of the other boys. Piggy and Ralph, under the threat of the sky, found themselves eager to take a place in this demented but partly secure society. They were glad to touch the brown backs of the fence that hemmed in the terror and made it governable"(152). Although Ralph and Piggy are the two characters who maintain their civility the most, even they possess savage emotions that can be awakened. The internal turmoil inside the characters proves that even when raised in civilization, savagery exists inside everyone.

Throughout the entirety of the novel, civility and savagery are locked in a continuous struggle. They are represented in the conflict between the main protagonist and antagonist, embodied in significant symbols, and present in the internal battles of the characters. These two forces greatly effect the boys on the island, as they struggle between living with the morals they were raised with, or giving in to their savage impulses. As the boys return to

civilization, they will forever be changed by the battle of civility and savagery that they now know exists